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PETER WHITNEY

AND HIS

HISTORY OF WORCESTER COUNTY

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Peter Whitney.

PETER WHITNEY, AND HIS HISTORY OF
WORCESTER COUNTY.

By JOHN C. CRANE.



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[Reprinted from the Proceedings of The Worcester Society of Antiquity for 1888.]

Rev. Peter Whitney :

Born Sept. 6th, (O. S.) 1744 ; died Feb. 29th, 1816.

MINISTER OF NORTHBOROUGH

FORTY-NINE YEARS.

PETER WHITNEY.



PETER WHITNEY, AND HIS HISTORY OF WORCESTER COUNTY.

REV. PETER WHITNEY was born at Petersham, Massachusetts, September 6 (O. S.), 1744. He was a son of the Rev. Aaron Whitney, the first minister of the church in Petersham, and who was ordained there in December, 1738, and continued preaching in that place until his death. Of him the following account has been handed down :

“Against Rev. Mr. Whitney, who had continued, both in his preaching and his praying, to inculcate submission to the sovereign, the tide of popular indignation rose at length to a high pitch. The church was rent by dissensions, and public worship was neglected, till at length, about the close of 1774, the town voted that ‘they will not bargain with, hire nor employ the Rev. Mr. Whitney to preach for them any longer.’ Mr. Whitney attempted to open negotiations for a reconciliation with the people, but they refused to compromise with him, discontinued his salary, and, finding that that would not cause him to desist from preaching, they chose a committee of ten on the 24th of the next May, ‘to see that the publick worship on Lord’s day next, and all future worship be not disturbed by any person or persons going into the desk, but such as shall be put in by the towns committee.’ In

pursuance of this vote, an armed guard was stationed at the meeting-house door on Sunday morning, who, when the minister arrived, and would have entered as usual, refused to allow him to pass. After this, Mr. Whitney preached regularly at his own house on the Sabbath, the services being attended by those who were politically in sympathy with him."

Peter Whitney, having prepared himself, entered Harvard College in 1759, and was graduated from that institution in the class of 1762, which numbered forty-seven. Among the classmates of Mr. Whitney who afterwards occupied high places in the walks of life, and whose names history hands down to posterity, were Francis Dana, who was a member of Congress in 1777-8, and who was later sent to England on peace negotiations, Minister to Russia 1780, Judge of the Massachusetts Supreme Court, 1785, and Chief Justice from 1791 to 1806; Elbridge Gerry, member of the first Continental Congress, one of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence, Minister to France, 1797, Governor of Massachusetts, 1810-12, Vice-President of the United States, 1813-14; and many others, who in stations of less importance, faithfully served their fellow-men in their day and generation.

Mr. Whitney's theological studies were also pursued at the same institution. After his graduation he for a time followed the occupation of school-teacher in the historic town of Lexington. At this place, January 2, 1763, he joined the Congregational Church. Having felt himself called to preach the gospel, we find that he was ordained to the ministry, and settled over the church in Northborough, November 4th, 1767, succeeding Rev. John Martyn, the first minister in that place. As in the case of many an old-time clergyman, this was his only pastorate. With them oftentimes a church settlement was a settlement for life. For half a century lacking one year he acted the part of a country minister, a faithful steward for his master. For this long period he went in and out before the little flock gathered about him, participating in their joys and sharing their sorrows. He was a man of method, although a little eccentric in some ways. As related to me by one of his grandsons, he was in the habit of walking to church

very sedately with his wife, ten of his children bringing up the rear, beginning with the eldest, then on down to the youngest. He was a man who took life easy, taking the hard knocks as they came, borrowing as little trouble as he could.

Contemporary with him in the ministry of the Word were Rev. Dr. Joseph Sumner, of Shrewsbury ; Rev. Archibald Campbell, of Charlton ; Rev. Edmund Mills, of Sutton ; Rev. Thaddeus McCarty, of the Old South, and Rev. Dr. Aaron Bancroft (father of the eminent historian, George Bancroft), of the Second Parish, Worcester ; and Rev. Dr. John Crane, an ancestor of the writer, who preached the first sermon at the organization of what is known as the Worcester South Conference of Congregational Churches, held at Millbury June 17, 1828. Space forbids the mention of many other faithful servants engaged with Mr. Whitney during his long ministry of the gospel.

He was a member of the Marlborough Association. In September, 1806, he was chosen a member of a committee to meet delegates from that and other associations at Rutland soon afterwards, when the outcome was "The Evangelical Missionary Society," which was productive of much good. It was my fortune several years ago to attend the funeral of Capt. John Glazier of Worcester, but for many years a prominent business man of Northborough. The funeral was held at the latter place, where Mr. Whitney so long preached. After the funeral sermon, an opportunity was given for those present to say a word in reference to the deceased. Several did so, men whose locks were white with the frost of age ; men who as boys sat under the preaching of Peter Whitney, and who, judging from their general appearance and the tone of their remarks, were greatly benefited thereby.

In the political business of his day he took a deep interest, more perhaps than most men of his calling. Judging from what can be gathered from all sources, I feel justified in saying, that in all matters that benefitted the people, whether political, social or religious, he was ever found an earnest advocate.

During his lifetime Mr. Whitney put forth several publications, most of them being very brief. The largest work by him, and by which he is best known to-day, is his History of Worcester County. Following is a list of his published writings :

Two Discourses on the occasion of a Publick Fast. 1774.

A Sermon on the Declaration of Independence.* 1776.

History of Worcester County. 1793.

A Half-Century Discourse on praising the works of God to succeeding generations. Delivered at Northborough June 14th, 1796.

An Ordination Charge at Boylston. 1797.

A Sermon at the ordination of his son. Quincy, 1800.

A Sermon on the death of Washington. 1800.

Address at the dedication of a church, Southborough. 1806.

A Funeral Sermon at Shrewsbury at the death of the wife of Rev. Dr. Sumner. 1810.

He was still with the church at Northborough when he published his History of the County in 1793. Such a history was greatly needed at the time, and Mr. Whitney was persuaded by his friends to undertake the work. Having been born in the county, he felt an interest in its history. The work having been begun proved more formidable than he expected. In the preface he says: "Had the writer of these sheets known before he began, what a labor it would have been, he would not have attempted it, but having begun he was unwilling to desist, and has been urged on by the partiality of his friends."

Could he have foreseen the estimation in which his work would be held a century later, the old parson would have been amply repaid for all the labor spent upon it. No book of its kind

* January 8, 1778, an advertisement appeared in *The Massachusetts Spy*, of a sermon preached by Rev. Peter Whitney of Northborough, at a special lecture appointed for publishing the Declaration of Independence, Sept. 12, 1776, entitled, "American Independence Vindicated." In the *Spy* of Jan. 15, 1778, we notice the following in relation to the above: "The copy [of the sermon] was prepared for the press more than twelve months ago, and a considerable part of the impression made, when, through the fraud of some journeymen, the work was discontinued at Worcester, and sent to Boston, where through the want of paper, and other unfortunate circumstances, it now first makes its appearance. It is not doubted that this excellent sermon will now be very acceptable to the publick.—STEARNS & BIGELOW."

is more relied upon than his. The town histories published in the County, and State gazetteers put forth since that day, teem with quotations from it, thus showing the confidence placed in its details. An elaborate map for that day preceded the title-page. This map was prepared from surveys by Charles Baker and Capt. John Pierce, both residents of the county. It was on a scale of four miles to the inch, and bears the name of Seymour & Co. The title-page reads as follows: "The History of the County of Worcester, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, with a particular account of every Town, from its first settlement to the present time, including its ecclesiastical state. Together with a Geographical Description of the same. To which is prefixed a Map of the County at large, from actual survey. By Peter Whitney, A. M., Minister of the Gospel in Northborough, in said County. Printed at Worcester, Massachusetts, by Isaiah Thomas. Sold by him in Worcester, by said Thomas and Andrews in Boston, and by said Thomas and Carlisle in Walpole, New Hampshire. MDCCXCIII."

The History was dedicated in the following manner: "To John Adams, LL. D., Vice-President of the United States, and President of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, etc., etc., this history intended to promote the knowledge of a part of his native Commonwealth, is inscribed, with all respect, by his most obedient and humble servant, Peter Whitney. Northborough, July, 1793."

May 2, 1793, the following advertisement appeared in *The Massachusetts Spy*:

"Proposal for printing by subscription, A History of the County of Worcester, Commonwealth of Massachusetts. By Peter Whitney, A. M.

"*Conditions*: 1st.—This work shall be printed in a handsome 8vo. volume, on good paper, and a fair type, and will contain above 300 pages. 2d.—The price to subscribers in boards, shall be 6 shillings for each book and 8 shillings bound and lettered. 3d.—No money to be paid until the books are ready for delivery, when punctual payment will be expected. 4th.—The work shall be put to press as soon as 400 copies are subscribed for. Sub-

scriptions received by Isaiah Thomas, the intended publisher in Worcester ; by said Thomas & Andrews in Boston, and by such gentlemen as in whose hands subscription papers are lodged. Those gentlemen who have in their hands subscription papers for the work are requested to be so obliging as to return them as speedy as possible to the author in Northborough, or to Isaiah Thomas."

The next that we find in reference to the book we quote from the *Spy*: "District of Massachusetts. On the 20th day of January in the 18th year of the Independence of the United States, Isaiah Thomas deposited the title of a book, to wit, The History of Worcester County, whereof he claims as proprietor.

"N. Goodale, Clerk of the District."

Although the History is dated 1793, we find nothing more in relation to the work until April 24, 1794, when the *Spy* published the following advertisement: "This day published, price 9 shillings bound and lettered, Whitney's History of Worcester County. Subscribers may now be supplied with books." This advertisement was repeated several times. In the *Spy* of Feb. 6, 1805, an advertisement of the History again appears after a long interval: "History of the County of Worcester. In one volume, octavo, with a large and accurate map. Price one dollar and fifty cents. The above work certainly contains many useful and valuable documents respecting the settlement, rise and progress of the County of Worcester, which are not to be found elsewhere, and which must not only prove interesting and instructive to our youth, who may wish to become acquainted with the history of their own county. The map itself is certainly worth half the money."

Through the courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, I am permitted to give a copy of the original contract between Peter Whitney and Isaiah Thomas, now in the possession of that Society:

AGREEMENT.

"Memorandum of an agreement made this fifteenth day of August, one Thousand Seven hundred and Ninety three, between Peter Whitney of Northborough, in the County of Worcester and Commonwealth of Massachusetts Clerk, on the one part, and

Isaiah Thomas of Worcester in said county and commonwealth, Printer, on the other part, Witnesseth, That the said Whitney hereby sells and relinquishes to the said Thomas the copyright of a Book whereof he is the Author entitled "A History of the County of Worcester, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, with a particular account of every Town from its first settlement to the present time etc—together with a map of the County at large, from actual survey"—for the consideration that the Said Thomas give him the Said Whitney Ninety four Copies of Said Book, when published, bound and lettered, Six Copies bound lettered and gilt, and fifty Copies in Sheets (Said Thomas to bind Said fifty Copies for Said Whitney, he paying Said Thomas therefor the Sum of Two Shillings for each Copy) ; and Further to give said Whitney one hundred Copies, bound and lettered, of all future Editions of Said Book provided Said Whitney revise, correct, and add to the Same whatever may by Said Thomas be Deemed necessary ; and also by said Whitney.

"In Testimony whereof the Parties have hereunto Set their hands and Seals the Day and year before written.

"PETER WHITNEY [Seal.]

"In presence of

ISAIAH THOMAS"[Seal.]

"Alex^r Thomas Jun^r,

"Elisha H. Waldo."

Previous to the death of Mr. Whitney he had revised and corrected a copy of his History up to the year 1810. The copy so corrected by his own hand is now in the possession of the American Antiquarian Society. It was evidently his intention to publish another edition, but his death soon after left his project uncompleted.

Mr. Whitney possessed in a remarkable degree the qualifications that go to make a good historian. To be sure, the field was his own, and unworked before ; but without judgment and painstaking care no correct history can be written. The greed for gain shown in the preparation of some modern histories, has done much to mystify the student. The careless manner in which much of the matter has been collected, is apparent from their

work when completed. No correct history can be given unless those engaged in writing it are actuated by some other motive than the accumulation of the Almighty Dollar.

It is evident from the History by Peter Whitney that he was thoroughly interested in the work in which he was engaged. It is laid down by a great writer that "Truth is the most important attribute of history." In the main, facts and dates must be gathered from annals and acts publicly recorded by the persons chosen for that purpose ; and this is of more importance when the writer is not contemporary with the events noted. On this point it will be found that Mr. Whitney took the utmost care. The best sources of information were at once resorted to by him. If unable to give the right name of anything, or the date of any event, he called particular attention to that fact, not undertaking to fill the deficiency by substituting those of his own.

It is said, "We ought to distrust a historian who is deficient in critical discernment, who is fond of fables, or who scruples not, in order to please and amuse his readers, to alter or disguise the truth." The subject of this sketch is open to none of the charges in the above statement. Mr. Whitney confined himself to giving a plain, unvarnished presentation of facts. The history of each town in the county was briefly told, from its incorporation to date of publication. The geography of the towns, and their church history came in for their full share in the work. A table was given showing the dates of incorporation of the towns, the settlement, death or dismissal of the several ministers, and the number of inhabitants in each town up to 1791, which has been found to be an invaluable aid in the preparation of later historical work. Also will be found in his History a terse, but quite complete article on the rivers of the county, their sources, and all the details necessary to give a thorough knowledge of their courses from fountain head to delivery of their tribute. One other history of the county has been, and others will be, written ; but the one by Peter Whitney will endure while time shall last, as a solid foundation of facts built by a master workman, whose clear brain guided a willing pen as it wove a fabric of truth for generations yet to come.

The house where the old historian lived so long at Northborough is still occupied and well-preserved. Within this old mansion a work was begun and finished, that has outlived him who wrought three-fourths of a century ago. Here brain was busy with facts and dates. Important though they were, the details were sometimes tiresome. Nevertheless the work went steadily on to completion; and when finished, it was a work of which the generation of his time were not ashamed, and which stands to-day an enduring monument to Peter Whitney.

March 11, 1768, Mr. Whitney was married to Julia Lambert, of Reading, Mass. They had eleven children, whose names and dates of birth and death are as follows:

Thomas Lambert, born Dec. 10, 1768; died June, 1812.

Peter, born Jan. 19, 1770; died March 3, 1843.

Julia, died in infancy.

Julia, born Aug. 25, 1772; died Nov. 29, 1800.

Margaret, born Feb. 12, 1774; married Dea. Josiah Adams of Quincy; and died Feb. 3, 1849.

Elizabeth, born Sept. 6, 1775; married Ebenezer Adams of Quincy, whose brother Josiah married her sister Margaret; died Sept. 26, 1856.

William Lincoln, who afterwards became a Colonel, born Dec. 14, 1776; died July 24, 1834.

Aaron, born Aug. 11, 1778; went West, where he died.

Sarah, born Nov. 3, 1781; lived until she reached the age of 84 in 1864.

Abel, born May 23, 1783.* He became deacon of a church in Cambridge, Mass.; and died in that city Feb. 22, 1853. One of his sons became a practising lawyer in that city.

John, born Sept. 29, 1785. He became a teacher and business man at Quincy, where he died Jan. 2, 1850.

* In Rev. Joseph Allen's History of the Worcester Association, published in 1868, the birth of Abel Whitney is recorded as occurring Nov. 3, 1781, which is incorrect. The date, corrected as above, I have from a grandson of Peter Whitney: namely, Mr. Augustus A. Whitney, of North Cambridge, Mass., to whom I am indebted for valuable information.

In 1868, it was said that none of Mr. Whitney's descendants were then living in Northborough, where he preached and resided for so long a period. In the family of Mr. Whitney the ministry seems to have been a chosen profession. His father, Aaron, as before stated was minister at Petersham ; Peter at Northborough ; Peter, Jr., at Quincy ; George, son of Peter, Jr., at West Roxbury and Jamaica Plain ; and Frederick Augustus, another son, at Brighton. One son of Mr. Whitney, Peter, Jr., and three grandsons were also graduates of Harvard College.

Mr. Whitney died suddenly Feb. 29, 1816. He lies buried at Northborough, near where he told the glad tidings of the gospel for half a century. The grave is pleasantly located on high ground, but the marks of time are all about it. Like many of the oldest church-yards in New England, this one is but little used. There within the sound of the old church bell lies the first historian of the County. But its tones he heeds not ; 'midst crumbling gravestones, and the bones of the early dead, he sleeps well. Over his grave climbs the straggling briar ; the daisy and the buttercup nod their heads as the wind sweeps by, but the spirit of the good man is with God who gave it.

The following tribute appeared at the time of Mr. Whitney's death in 1816 :

"Died in Northborough on the 29th of February, Rev. Peter Whitney, in the 72d year of his age, and the 49th of his ministry. On the 5th instant (March) his remains were accompanied to the house of worship, and from thence to the grave, by a numerous procession of relations, friends and acquaintances, and with all the solemnities by which a religious people could express their affection and respect for his character. He has left a widow and children to mourn his death.

Mr. Whitney was the son of the Rev. Aaron Whitney, many years minister of Petersham. He graduated at Cambridge College (Harvard) in 1762, and in November of 1767, was ordained as the pastor of the church and people of Northborough. Few men gave in life a fairer exemplification of the virtues and graces of a Christian minister, as these are portrayed by the Apostle, than

the subject of this sketch. His disposition was mild and benevolent. He possessed urbanity of manners and was "given to hospitality." He was the friend of the poor and distressed, and "ready to every good work." As a theologian he was catholic ; disapproving an exclusive spirit among the disciples of the same master. In his ministerial and Christian intercourse, he readily extended his charity to all who by their lives evidenced that they loved the "Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth." His method of preaching was evangelical, and his sermons partook of the mild and charitable spirit of the gospel. He was attentive to the various duties of his office, unwearied in their performance ; and wherever his agency was directed, he manifested a disposition to diffuse the kindly influences of our religion. Industrious in his habits, Mr. Whitney found time to labor for the public without the strict line of his profession. Having previously printed a number of occasional sermons, in 1793, he published a history of the County of Worcester. Correct in its dates, and authentic in its facts, its utility is acknowledged by all who become acquainted with its merits. It is a book to which intercourse is frequently had ; and it should be found in the library of every gentleman, who desires to make himself acquainted with the first settlement and subsequent growth of the county.

"This publication brought the author into the notice of our literary institutions, and in consequence he was elected a member of the Historical Society of Massachusetts. With much care Mr. Whitney had collected materials to amend and enlarge his History, and had nearly put them into form for a second edition. We hope that it may be presented to the public for the benefit of his family.

"Mr. Whitney had the happiness to be connected with a people truly Christian and generous, who ever manifested towards him their sympathy and beneficence. In the former part of his ministry his dwelling, with his library and a great part of his manuscripts and household furniture, were consumed by fire. On this occasion, they very generously administered to his relief, and at no subsequent period did they cease from their friendly and benevolent attention to him and his family. Mr. Whitney passed

his long ministry in perfect peace and harmony both with the Church and Society. At his death, he left but one male who was a member of the Church at his ordination, and but one couple who at that time were married. Having filled up the measure of his life, having been active and useful unto the end, encircled with domestic endearments, possessed of the affection and esteem of the people of his charge, and respected by numerous and valuable friends and acquaintances, Mr. Whitney, without suffering the pain of disease or the decrepitude of age, was gathered unto his fathers, and in spirit we trust, now realizes the worth of that divine benediction, 'Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.'"

The following contribution is thought to be worthy of a place in this paper :

"Northborough, Sept. 26, 1769. The good women of Northborough, zealous of emulation—yea, ambitious of excelling their sisters in other towns, agreed to spin what each should please, and appointed a day on which to meet at the house of Rev. Mr. Whitney, to present him and his consort with what each had spun for that end ;—accordingly, on the day appointed, they assembled at the house of their minister about 3 o'clock in the P. M., bringing with them the Fruit of their Labours & Industry. Upon computing, it was found that they had brought 70 fourteen knotted skains of Linen, 94 seven-knotted skains of Tow, & 83 seven-knotted skains & 4 knots of Cotton : amounting to 2223 knots : also one woman brought a Linen Sheet ; two others brought each of them a towel, another sent a pound of worsted : all of which they generously gave to their Reverend pastor. The number of women was forty-four. It is presumed that this act of generosity much exceeds what any other people have done for their minister in this way, that we have heard of : especially will it be thought so when the smallness of the place, the fewness of its members, that this was spun at their *own houses*, and out of their *own materials* are considered."

"The above is copied from the 'Massachusetts Gazette,' Oct. 5, 1769, nearly six years before the commencement of the Revo-

lution. It is interesting to notice the changes in the employments and habits of the mothers and daughters of our own little village since the above date. Nearly all the families in the town, we suppose, were represented by the forty-four women who brought in or sent contributions to their pastor; and all these women were *spinners*, and all the *material*—the wool and the flax—were grown on the farm; only '83 seven knotted skeins and 4 knots of cotton,' being of foreign growth—imported, no doubt, from the East Indies. Cotton cloth must then have been a great rarity; and a dress of calico must have been as fashionable and as much sought after by the young women of that day as silks and velvets are now. In those early times no one dreamed that in less than a century, cotton would be king, a despot, that affected to rule with absolute sway; against whose usurpation and tyranny there would be in the coming ages a great uprising of twenty millions of freemen, determined to free themselves from an ignominious bondage.

"Rev. Mr. Whitney was at this time a young and popular minister, having been settled as pastor of the Church in Northborough scarcely two years. His wife, too, afterwards known and still remembered by a few as *Madame Whitney*, was also a young and blooming bride. She was a native of Reading in this State, and on the occasion of her wedding was honored by a cavalcade of young men from Northborough, who met the bridal party at Marlborough and escorted them to their home, where they were received by a large number of the inhabitants of the town, who had taken possession of the parsonage and made ready a bountiful repast. A delegation of two members of the Church,—as we learned from the lips of one of the number, the late Thaddeus Fay, who died in 1822 at the age of 95,—attended the wedding ceremony, and accompanied the bridegroom and bride on horseback, the whole distance.

"Madame Whitney (formerly Julia Lambert) died while on a visit to her son, the late Peter Whitney, of Quincy, Jan. 10, 1821, about five years after the death of her husband."

The following correspondence will be of interest here, and will serve to show the oldtime ideas of ministerial courtesy and propriety.*

[Rev. Peter Whitney to Rev. Reuben Puffer, of Berlin.]

Northborough, April 22^d, 1801.

Dear Sir:—Since I saw you last (Sabbath evening) at Mr. Packard's, some things have taken place, which need, and must have an explanation, before any ministerial intercourse is renewed between us.

In the meantime, to prevent all future difficulty, I now tell you, plainly & explicitly, that if you wish to preserve the harmony which has, for so many years, happily subsisted between us; & to keep up that ministerial interchange of kind and brotherly offices which has, heretofore, been so much for our mutual advantage, you must not presume, *in any case or instance whatsoever*, to come within the limits of Northborough to perform *any* ministerial act or service, when I am at home, & able to perform the same.

I am, your friend & brother,

PETER WHITNEY.

Rev. Mr. Puffer.

[Mr. Puffer to Mr. Whitney.]

Berlin, April 23^d, 1801.

Rev. & Dear Sir:—The explanation you demand in your letter of yesterday, it was my determination to have given unasked, the first convenient opportunity.

Last Saturday, Deacon Davis came to me with a request from Mrs. Ball to attend the funeral of her husband on the Monday following. I observed to him, that, previous to my answer, I

* I am indebted to Rev. W. A. Houghton, of Berlin, for the privilege of obtaining the copies of these letters. They are published with the approval of representatives of Mr. Whitney's family.

must first know your sentiments respecting such a step. He informed me, that he had conversed with you on the subject, and that, on his proposing to you this question, "Will Mr. Puffer's attending Mr. Ball's funeral create any difficulty betwixt you & him;" your answer was, after some hesitation, "No, not that I know of." This by no means satisfied me; and I told the Deacon, that I doubted the propriety of my going, and desired him to return and urge Mrs. Ball, by every consideration, to send for you. This he agreed to do, first requesting me to accompany him. Flattered with the hope of being the happy instrument of bringing to a conclusion a long subsisting difficulty, I consented; but went with the full determination of not attending on Monday, in case my arguments failed of the desired effect. The conversation that took place was too lengthy to be detailed. Suffice it to say, that, after exhausting every topic of persuasion, to no purpose, I conveyed to Mrs. Ball in an oblique manner, and in the softest terms possible, a denial of her request. She fell into tears—said she wished not to involve me in difficulty—and that, if it must be so, she acquiesced in it as the will of Providence. In that impressive moment, I felt my resolution give way. Turning to Deacon Davis, I said to him, "Is it your opinion, sir, from all the conversation you have had with Mr. Whitney, that my attending this funeral will cause him to be offended with me?" He directly answered, "No." I then consented to attend; first desiring that Mrs. Ball would invite you to be present, still entertaining the secret hope, that a friendly interview, especially on so solemn an occasion, might efface every unfavorable impression, and revive ancient friendship.

From this statement you will perceive, that nothing was further from my intentions than to grieve or offend you. Could I have foreseen that you would have viewed my conduct in the offensive light you do, no ordinary consideration should have prevailed with me to have gone into Northborough on such an occasion. Malignity towards you, I trust you will believe me when I say, I certainly had none. And if you think it a weakness in me, to suffer myself to be overcome by a sight unusually affecting, I hope you will at least allow it to be a pardonable one.

And thus, sir, I have rendered you the explanation you ask. Whether satisfactory, or not, I must leave you to decide.

Respecting the latter part of your letter, I am unable to reply to it so fully as I could wish, till I know how far you extend the idea of "*any* ministerial act or service." A neighbor & parishioner of mine moves within the limits of Northborough. Sickness & death invade his family. I make him a visit on the occasion. This is a lower act of ministerial service. I converse with him, and offer him the consolations of the gospel. This is a further act of it. He earnestly requests me, his former minister, to pray with & for him in his affliction. This is a still higher act of it. Be pleased to let me know which, or whether all of these, fall within your meaning of "*any* ministerial act or service," which you "plainly & explicitly" tell me, I "must not presume, *in any case or instance whatsoever*, to come within the limits of Northborough to perform." Or, I have a son in Northborough: must I not "presume" to pray with him, in case of sickness, till your permission is first obtained? Be assured, Sir, that no one will be more careful than I, "to prevent all future difficulty;" but if you mean, by anything you have said, to place me in a singular & disadvantageous situation, I better know what becomes me as a man, and a Christian minister, than tamely to submit to it. In the meantime I act on no principle which I will complain of in another. And therefore, though I shall not probably again "come within the limits of Northborough," on any occasion similar to that which has given you so much offence; yet I give you my free consent to "come within the limits" of Berlin, for the purpose of performing "*any* ministerial act or service," to which you may be invited, whether "I am at home, and able to perform the same" or not.

As you have thought fit to suspend our "ministerial intercourse," till such time as a satisfactory "explanation" of my conduct shall be given; I have a right to expect that you will explicitly inform me, whether you consider this communication in that light, or not; as in the latter case, I am determined to take measures to ascertain, whether I had your consent to attend Mr. Ball's funeral, or went without it. I am, Rev. & Dear Sir, respectfully yours,

Rev. Mr. Whitney.

REUBEN PUFFER.

[Mr. Whitney to Mr. Puffer.]

Northborough, April 27th, 1801.

Dear Sir:—Your letter of the 23d inst. I received next day, at evening in the midst of company ; & have had company till this morning, & then had sick to visit ; & this afternoon, though I now have company, I think it expedient to make the following reply.

The explanation you have given is so far satisfactory as to operate for the entire renewal of our ministerial intercourse in any and every respect.

As a proof of this, I request you to attend my lecture on the Thursday after next (the 7th of May) & come in season to dine. I know not whose turn it will be to preach, as I mean to send to Mr. Sumner.

As to the latter part of my letter to you of the 22d inst., you make some exceptions to my general, perhaps, universal proposition, to which I readily consent, as being not only, not improper, but very reasonable.

Perhaps you may think of some others hereafter, which you may suppose your duty as a man, & a Christian minister may lead you to make, but I shall reserve to myself the liberty to consider & receive any acts of yours in conformity to such exceptions, as brotherly or otherwise, according to existing circumstances : nothing doubting, however, from what you say, that your prudence & caution will lead you to avoid everything which might grieve or offend a weak brother. I am Sir, your friend & brother,

PETER WHITNEY.

Rev. Mr. Puffer.

NOTE.—“The sequel of this affair was that Deacon Jonathan Livermore, the centenarian, son-in-law of James Ball, senior, died within a few days. The Balls would not have Mr. Whitney; Mr. Puffer this time *respectfully declined*, so the good old deacon was buried without obsequies.”

(Nov., 1891, 20,000)

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